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ABSTRACT

This guide for educators who work with discouraged and defeated learners recommends ways to prevent problems and offers approaches to develop positive attitudes. The introduction dispels common fictions about discouraged learners. Part 1, "Profiles of Our Other Youth: Discouraged and Defeated Learners," describes behavioral and life situations, including low self-confidence, fragile home lives, and a perception of success as a matter of luck or task simplicity. "Harmful Adult Reactions and Behavior," part 2, recommends flexible strategies and avoidance of subtle behaviors that develop discouragement. Part 3, "Helpful Adult Reactions and Behavior," enumerates strategies: expect success, insist on responsibility, and emphasize real cause and effect relationships. Teachers should stress concepts and reward practical strengths. "Diversity in Learning and Teaching," part 4, discusses understanding and responding to different learning and teaching styles. Part 5, "Goal Settings, Attaining, Scoring," recommends goal strategies and offers an attainment worksheet. "Working with Abrasive Kids and Building Responsibility," part 6, focuses on difficult behaviors and their causes. Part 7, "Conflict Resolution with Discouraged Kids," identifies types of conflicts and the adult's problem-solving role. "Final Guidelines" outlines methods involved in working with discouraged students, including encouraging a sense of control and avoidance of patronizing. Sources are appended. (CJH)

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OUR OTHER YOUTH

Handbook of Guidelines for Teachers and Other Adults Who Work With At Risk Kids and Discouraged or Defeated Learners

Jerry Conrath

OUR OTHER YOUTH

Jerry Conrath

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OUR OTHER YOUTH

Other books by Jerry Conrath:
HOW TO ENHANCE YOUR TEACHING CAREER

THE COLUMBIA RIVER: ITS FUTURE AND YOU - 9-12 integrated curriculum

OUR OTHER YOUTH is a product of the author's 20 years' working with discouraged and defeated learners, workshops and classes developed and delivered to teachers of at risk youth, and numerous writings done for regional and national publications.

A special tribute must be delivered to the teachers, counselors, administrators, youth service workers who attend the annual conference in Portland, Oregon, OUR OTHER YOUTH. The conference is directed by the author of this book, and he owes gratitude to those tough and energetic adults whose brains and experience he vigorously picks.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS?

"To learn about special things — like China and our body."
Ryan — a first grader

At-Risk-Youth — "A large proportion of children from poor families of all races . . . minority and immigrant children who face discriminatory policies and practices, large numbers of girls and young women who miss out on education opportunities routinely afforded males, and children with needs who are unserved, underserved, or improperly categorized because of handicap or learning difficulties . . ."

from *Who's Looking Out for At-Risk-Youth*,
The States' Excellence in Education
Commissions, 1985

This book of guidelines is for adults who work with the kids described above. More, it is for adults who wish to help these kids learn, to come to feel good about how they learn, to stop feeling discouraged and defeated about the process of learning. Not all at risk youth are defeated learners; but most are. Learning defeat is not a terminal condition. It can be battled. In the primary grades it can be prevented. In the intermediate grades it can be cured. By middle school years it must be vigorously attacked and set back. When the youngster enters high school we must establish themes and rhythms of self-esteem and work from each as carefully and skillfully as a composer re-orchestrates a symphony.

OUR OTHER YOUTH

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WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS?

"I think the purpose of school is to get a good education like learn how to read and write and do arithmetic. It's a place to learn and discuss new things every day."

Mary — an alternative middle school student

INTRODUCTION

School dropout, learning discouragement, and juvenile cultural estrangement are illnesses the school nurse cannot treat. Nor can advice for treatment be found in a parent's dictionary of childhood diseases. Discouraged kids do not throw up school; they drop out of it. The purpose of this book of guidelines is to assist adults who work with our kids who do not succeed in school. And help is urgently needed.

Nationally it is claimed that 25% of our young of high school age dropout of school rather than gain a diploma — or so goes the estimate. It is probably, like many national estimates of unpleasant realities, an underestimated figure. And this 25% notion does not count students who drop out prior to their class entering the freshman year of high school. The "problem" has become a national crisis!

Readers of this book will find information on how these kids best learn, rather than details of what they cannot do. Also found here will be specific information on adult skills needed in successfully turning learning discouragement into learning encouragement rather than, as all too often, defeat.

Skills and ideas detailed in this book have been put into effective operation in a variety of classrooms and school situations: alternative schools; dropout prevention counseling programs; school mentoring systems; and regular classrooms at all levels, K-12.

When defeated learners — our other youth — drop out of school, they cite self-critical reasons: I can't do the work; I'm too dumb; I don't belong here; I'm just too lazy. Or school-critical reasons: I don't get the help I need; Nobody knows who I am; Nobody cares who I am. In their self-criticism they repeat what they have heard of themselves: their "slowness," "disruptiveness," and "lack of responsibility." Adults with whom they have worked have, usually unintentionally, helped them see themselves in those ways. This is ugly and avoidable. In this book we will look at sources of such messages, how to avoid them, and how to combat discouragement and defeat when a youngster begins to talk and behave that way.

In their critique of the school, they are astute. Many middle schools and high schools are organized to be too large, too fragmented, too impersonal. They are often confusing institutions rather than clarifying ones. They frequently are intellectually threatening rather than nourishing. They are too big to be personalizing. In fact, unless a child has dealt with the juvenile court system, middle school is the first impersonal institution faced. This is very frightening to a child who already sees the world from the mind of one with low self-esteem and the germs of learning discouragement. School reform is not the focus of this book. But reform and reorganization must be addressed before we can say we have really made an all-out attempt to improve holding power. In the meantime, we can work better on a daily basis with our kids who are emotionally and intellectually damaged.

We can start by arming ourselves with reality in face of common fictions regarding our discouraged and defeated learners.

FICTION: Some kids who don't do their schoolwork just don't care.

REALITY: They have given up on themselves and on adults. They care. They have become, in many cases, clever at behaving in non-caring, but coping, ways. And why not? We often do when our noses are continuously rubbed in our lack of success.

FICTION: This is a home problem, not a school problem; thus, there is very little school can do.

REALITY: Homes that don't monitor school attendance, an economy that no longer needs young people and their work, and a society that accepts poverty and unemployment as "natural" phenomena in an otherwise affluent population are certainly partly to blame for school dropout, but there is much

school can do. Efforts to de-centralize overly large schools into satellite schools-within-schools that provide personal attention to students have been highly successful in improving attendance and daily involvement of previously disengaged students. Attempts to make curriculum and instruction active events instead of passive non-events are well known to all. Detailing what adults can do to make a positive difference is the focus of this book.

Adults who make the effort, rather than droning on about kids who do not make the effort, are successful with discouraged learners.

FICTION: The dropout problem is a high school problem.

REALITY: It is a K-12 problem at least. Behaviors that are discussed in this book show at an early age. Avoidance, easy defeat, giving up, pretending not to care are identified as early as kindergarten by teachers.

FICTION: With tight fiscal accountability, dropout prevention approaches are too expensive. We can't do everything.

REALITY: We can't afford not to. Seventy percent of our prison inmates are high school dropouts. It costs taxpayers about 6 times as much yearly to house a prison inmate as it does to educate a child in public school. Further, more young people hold tax paying jobs after completing additional schooling than do dropouts who take no further schooling. It is a matter of paying now or paying much more later. Dropout prevention is cost effective. No district, without reducing its dropout rate, can be called excellent in spite of such cosmetic "reforms" as raising graduation requirements, lengthening the school day and year, or increasing scores on standardized tests.

FACT: Concerned, skillful, knowledgeable, tough adults make a difference.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS?

"To develop truer, kinder, simpler, quieter, firmer, and, therefore, wiser and stronger young." *Dag Hammarskjold*

PROFILES OF OUR OTHER YOUTH: DISCOURAGED AND DEFEATED LEARNERS

- Statistically, at risk youth are low in reading skills, are behind grade level in credits earned, come from poverty homes with but one parent in the home, are abusers of drugs and alcohol, lack employable skills, and may be juvenile law offenders. Researchers say school dropouts are characterized by one or more of these factors.
- This is probably true statistically, but it does not provide us with an actual "profile" of the discouraged youth we are working with. Researchers do not work with discouraged youth.
- It must be noted that "discouraged" and "defeated" learners are but one part of the general category "at risk" youth, and are the young people described in this set of guidelines.
- Great care must be taken by teachers not to indulge in the common assumptions regarding discouraged learners:

1. These youngsters **are not** necessarily low in "ability." Fact: They lack skills, usually from too little attendance at school, beginning in elementary school. They also lack skills from too little positive attention from teachers up through high school; they are often not a delight to be around. But to confuse "skills" with "smarts" is inaccurate. Skills can be learned.

2. Single-parent homes are part of the statistic, but have **little to do** with the profile of a learner. The issue is "fragile" homes and parenting. Many single parents provide strong role models; many two-parent homes are weak and fragile emotionally. The single-parent stereotype is more part of the cultural prejudice against divorce — coupled with racism — than a careful observation of causes for learning defeat.

3. These kids **do** want to learn. The insult often cited by school officials who become defensive when dropout rates are discussed is, "We are doing a fine job with kids who want to learn." Fact: No study on reasons for dropping out indicate "I don't want to learn" as a reason. In many years working with discouraged and defeated learners, I never came across a youngster who did not want to learn. I did come across many who rejected specific substance or style of delivery — fragmented, irrelevant, confusing, intellectually threatening — but never a "non-learner."

4. Discouraged learners **are** interested in goals. Fact: Goal setting and scoring is one of the most effective methods to keep potential dropouts in school, as explained in the section on goal setting. The issue is that discouraged kids are highly interested in short-run, clearly measured goals and not in long-range, career interest or term project goals. Their life is one of seeking immediate pay-off; not one of mature patience and endurance.

5. Discouraged learners **are not** usually serious trouble-makers. Fact: These kids —remember "discouraged and defeated" learners — are far too lacking in self-confidence to swagger down the halls picking fights with others. Their damaged egos cause them to be avoiders (another kind of trouble to be sure) rather than attackers. Many at risk youth are indeed serious troublemakers, but few are the kids dealt with here.

- Who, then, are these kids?

Discouraged learners fit the following profile of behavior and life situation:

1. They are low in self-confidence, have a deeply held sense of personal impotency, helplessness, and lack of self-worth.

2. They are avoiders. They avoid school because it is demanding and/or threatening, or because it is confusing and unresponsive to their needs. They avoid contact and

confrontation with other students and adults, for they are not confident of themselves. They avoid classes because they are "behind" and because there is often a more satisfying short-run payoff to skipping school than going to class and trying to figure out what is going on. Avoidance of adults and school begins in the very early grades.

3. They are distrustful of adults and adult institutions. Adults in their life often have been unfair, unresponsive, or even abusive — mentally, intellectually, and/or physically. Gaining trust that you are not merely a continuation of a long line of ill-mannered adults is your primary task, but be patient; it will come only through your demonstration of good faith, good intentions, good deeds, and your skill in helping them learn.

4. They have a limited notion of the future. They are very responsive to short-run, measurable goals with demonstrations of success and competence. However, discouraged learners do not see the future as either bright or positive.

   Their life is usually grim and they have no cause to see the future any other way. Therefore, long-range class projects are deadening as are complicated career planning schemes. Even more than other youth, their life imitates a series of dreary, unimaginative TV dramas interrupted only by silly commercials of items not good for them. Teachers and other involved adults must be willing to compete for their attention and interrupt that tempo, rhythm, and pace. Or lose them.

5. At least by mid-school or junior high school, discouraged learners have good reason to be discouraged: they are behind others in academic skills. They usually lack adequate reading, writing, and math skills and have come to see themselves often as "dumb" rather than unskilled. Many adults see them that way too. Dumbness, goes the reasoning, cannot be cured so adults give up on them and the kids give up on themselves. School is often "nice" to them and stops taking them seriously as learners and only puts patty-cake worksheets in front of them that make no intellectual demands and offers no challenge. The students think that is "nice" but boring, and continues to avoid. They are not convinced that skills not yet learned can be learned.

6. In fragile homes, their parents often suffer similar characteristics: low skilled, low self-confidence, distrustful of institutions, avoidance, suspicious of the future. Indeed, some of these kids come from homes with parents eager to help, but more often, parent response is to be grateful that an adult finally is helping their child. Some of these fragile parents don't care, treat sons and daughters with hostility, and even engage in serious physical and sexual abuse. That reality in the life of the

discouraged learner, when it is reality, must be endured. Some come from homes of well-educated parents who are bewildered by their child's discouragement and lack of academic interest and success; these parents often feel great frustration, and the profile of their child is difficult, and sometimes impossible to pin down. Few of the youngsters under consideration here fit this category, but a few do and represent perhaps the most confusing child to deal with. Too often parents are of little help for they too are discouraged, feel impotent, sense helplessness in their lives. And far too many come from homes of poverty.

7. Discouraged learners often have, by textbook definition, adequate peer relationships. Some are powerfully lonely; others have friends that meet many emotional needs: caring, fun to be with, similar interests, supportive. Adults usually do not approve of the peer relationships, but the kids do and are unresponsive to school's attempts to get them to join into the social life as a strategy for combating discouragement.

   This doesn't work, often to the surprise and sometimes disgust of the adult who thought the idea so "neat." For discouraged learners, self-confidence will begin to grow with success in learning and skill development; not through critiquing their friends.

8. They are impatient with routine, long-time sitting and listening, and classrooms with little variety; more so than kids who feel good about themselves as learners and have a better developed political sense of how to get along in adult institutions. Because of this, and their low skills, discouraged learners are often seen as disruptive when they demonstrate their impatience, or when they ask the intelligent question, "Why do we have to do this?" Once the disruptive label is attached, there is a predictable chain to difficult, dumb, delinquent, dropout.

9. Discouraged learners often come from the category of learning preference identified as "practical" (This is developed in a later section.). With this, they are good at working out applications of what is being taught if that is allowed and encouraged. They learn well through their own private experience and can talk about that better than write about it. They remember very little of what is delivered in linguistic style to a physically passive, note-taking audience.

10. Most significantly, discouraged learners do not see a relationship between effort and achievement, but instead, see success as a matter of luck or ease of the task. They are "externalizers" — people who see the world as happening to them and one over which they have little control of events, especially failures and successes. When they do poorly, it is the result of an impossible task, bad luck, a bad day, or an adult who

refuses to help them. And, of course, to the "fact" that they are dumb, a situation of which they have no control and, therefore, can take no responsibility. It is the same when they do well: good luck, easy assignment, wonderful teacher. They will not take personal responsibility because they do not see the relationship; not, as adults often accuse, because they stubbornly refuse to. Because of this, conversations over how much effort they put into a task fall on deaf ears. To an externalizer, effort has little to do with it.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS?

"You give a child nothing when you give a joyless, driven, 'investment,' concept of the meaning of learning. Education is not about getting ahead; it is about discovering the joy of learning itself." *Meg Greenfield*

HARMFUL ADULT REACTIONS AND BEHAVIOR

- Rejection of the discouraged learner further implants the notion of inadequacy and reinforces externality. Many of these kids appear to invite, at least outwardly, rejection either through their deliberate behavior or through their underlying surliness. These are not the kids who greet you at the schoolhouse door each morning asking, "What can I do to help you have a nice day?" It takes a tough, determined adult to see through their behavior and refuse to reject.
- Any reaction by an adult that creates guilt rather than suggests responsibility is harmful. Guilt is a self-defeating emotion and when we are indulging in emotions of guilt, we are not looking at our responsibility. "I feel so guilty; I'm just a jerk," takes the action outside one's control and extends externality.
- Defeated learners are easy to avoid, for they are so good at avoidance. Like rejection, they often invite it and make it so easy for the already over-extended adult. Don't. They have been avoided too long. It is very harmful to avoid them either by physical and

personal withdrawal, or by another form of avoidance: authoritarian behavior. The authoritarian who will not discuss the rationale for a rule or penalty with a youngster is avoiding taking the kid seriously. That reinforces a sense of things being outside their control; hence, why bother.

- Inflexible behavior by school administrators, teachers, or parents only teaches the discouraged learner that they are correct: they are impotent, and avoidance is an intelligent response to inflexibility. Discouraged learners especially need to try out a variety of ways to learn and complete tasks. Remember, they do best when their personal experience is involved and when they can figure out how to make things work, to apply things. That style does not fit most classrooms; at least, on the secondary level. Too many schools have no direction and inflexible strategies. We must reverse that: clarity of direction and highly flexible strategies.

- We must not treat discouraged learners impersonally. Impersonality breeds irresponsibility, as does anonymity. And many secondary schools are too large for most students to be treated personally. All efforts must be made with these kids to break down anonymity, and they do not help us through their avoidance and crankiness. But these are discouragead and defeated youngsters; it is the adults' responsibility to break the ice and keep things warm. They have first names, and like more successful kids, enjoy and appreciate hearing them used. Many times, no matter how ugly their own behavior was, they have confided that the adult scolding did "not even know my name."

- Often, especially in secondary schools, discouraged learners will enter a classroom on the first day of school with a huge chip on their shoulder, go to the rear and scowl at the teacher, "I dare you to teach me anything." The teacher avoids the challenge and makes the Silent Bargain: "If you make no trouble for me," nods the teacher, "I will make no trouble for you." Which means never to call on the student, never to expose their lack of skills, never to offer an intellectual challenge, to allow the kid to sit back there all year long without having to get involved. Adults often do that rather than further increase the kid's fear and dislike of school. But it is patronizing, and patronizing discouraged learners only reinforces their self-assessment of being too dumb to do serious school work. The silent bargain must not be struck. Tough, determined teachers grab the kid by the scruff of the neck, shake them, and make it clear that avoidance time is over, serious work is to be done in this classroom: learning. It is also patronizing to counsel discouraged learners into "hands-on" classes (although, when used in regular classrooms, hands-on experiences are just what they need) that make no academic or intellectual demands. That, of course, treats them as dumb. They are unskilled, not dumb, and to avoid teaching them skills is reprehensible.

We patronize discouraged learners in many other ways too. Many kind, loving adults

overdose on "warm fuzzies" in place of serious work. Gooey experiences to help youngsters feel good about themselves are indequate. Warmth is fine. But students, even discouraged ones, come to feel good about themselves through demonstrable achievement, even if small. Some of our most acclaimed alternative schools patronize students by putting patty-cake work/play sheets in front of teenagers and gush over how wonderfully the work is done. Work that isn't worth doing — from which no real learning takes place — is not worth doing well. Sloppy expectations invite sloppy performance.

Or, when adults get all worked into a frenzy about teaching kids "survival" skills. Perhaps a few, but not many, of our discouraged potential dropouts will find their pursuit of happiness through survival. We must teach to thrive, not simply survive. Such programs are alternatives to learning, not learning alternatives.

And we too often get overly concerned in letting the student decide their "own pace" when we, rightfully, try to teach to diversity. The kids are not the experts; the adults are, or should be. It is patronizing to let a kid continue to learn at a painfully slow pace just because she has come to see herself as a "slow" learner. Remember, the ultimate in tracking is individualized instruction. Kids need frequently to work with the group for many reasons: social, intellectual, academic. These kids are real people who can do real school work when their learning strengths are engaged.

It is also patronizing to overemphasize incentives: trinkets, money, external rewards. This causes us to focus on the external reasons for why we do things rather than the internal. Only the internal motives for why we do things will lead to growth in self-esteem and internal responsibility. Incentives are fine to alter a discouraged learner's behavior: getting to class on time, bringing paper and pencil, not interrupting others. But there is ample evidence that external rewards actually retard learning (thorough, durable learning) and only enhance short-term memorizing, which is frequently followed by forgetting.

Successful kids often receive money for grades (also harmful to **learning**) and the unsuccessful kids sometimes are paid to go to school. If we want to transfer money into the hands and pockets of our young, we should do it to get the behavior we want — hard work, timely work, cooperation, etc. — but we make a mistake to confuse it with learning. So incentives are OK to get discouraged learners ready to learn, but pride in effort and personal responsibility will come only after the internal cause for doing school work, and doing it well, is clear. You have to help them find that and discuss it. Explain how it works for you.

- Anything we do to reinforce their sense of externality is harmful. When they do

something well, we must not say things like "aren't you lucky," or "isn't she a great teacher," or "you see, it doesn't take much effort." These are not inventions; they have all been overheard from well-intentioned, but harmful adults. The late arrival excuses, "somebody stole my pee-chee," and "my mother didn't get me up on time," are examples of external sense of control. The responsible adult must treat these for what they are, lack of responsibility, but neither deliberate nor malicious. These kids can get to class on time if they see it is in their interest to do so, and we must demonstrate that it is in their interest and confront such excuses as unnecessary. The issue must be what will the kid do to get there on time, rather than concentrating on the failure to do so.

- The following behaviors generally offered in classrooms, are subtle, but do contribute to a sense of discouragement and lack of self-confidence:

1. When teachers call on low achieving kids, they usually wait less time for an answer than they do for successful kids.
2. When a marginal answer is offered, teachers often either give the "right" answer or call on another student rather than helping the low achieving student develop a better answer that builds on what was already offered.
3. Low achieving students receive more criticism for their mistakes and much less praise for successes than do high achievers.
4. Low achievers receive less communication from most teachers than do high achievers.
5. As discouraged kids seek the seats in the rear of the class, they are seldom invited/encouraged to take a seat closer to the front.
6. With a borderline answer, high achievers more often receive the benefit of the doubt, but low achievers are often cut off.
7. Discouraged learners receive fewer smiles and less eye contact and non-verbal responsiveness than do cheerful kids.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS?

"The misssion of the common school system is to provide learning experience which will assist all students to develop skills, competencies, and attitudes that are fundamental to an individual's achievement as a responsible, contributing citizen."
Washington State Law

HELPFUL ADULT REACTIONS AND BEHAVIOR

- Expect success. Discouraged learners expect very little of themselves, and most adults expect little more. It is professionally irresponsible to put work in front of kids that we know they cannot do and is even, at their present skill level, out of their reach. When school work is requested that is responsible and success is carefully structured, let them know you expect success — for as the expert, you know it is possible — and effort, not luck, will bring it.
- Behavior that gets in the way of success and effort must be confronted and examined. Discouraged kids, too often, are only dismissed as having a bad "attitude" and they must do something about that. For all of us, it is behavior that brings achievement or lack of it; we don't have to have a good "attitude" — we can even dislike individuals (even kids) but we must behave in certain ways to get along and do the job. Discouraged kids are not sophisticated enough to sort this out, and they need help, which is seldom offered.

- Help them identify their problems: behavior, skills, hostility, avoidance. But keep it clear that success is their responsibility; assistance, demonstration, guidance, and evaluation is yours.
- Start with their present level of competence, not their incompetence. They are painfully aware of what they can't do. Start them off on learning with what they can do, and move on from there. Few of us get up each morning, question where we are incompetent and ignorant, and start our day from there. We start each day doing what we do well and/or by routine. So it must be with the classroom that is structured for success. A lively review demonstrating what is already known is a positive way to start a class session. After that, it is fair to ask for some risk taking.
- Emphasize process over product. Success can and must be structured around more than tests and so-called "end products." What discouraged learners need is an everyday evaluation of effort, learning strengths, growth, risk taking, creative thinking, critical thinking. The passion for further standardizing learning, thinking and testing will make this increasingly difficult, but not impossible.
- Be tough about insisting on personal responsibility for success and achievement. Discouraged kids, as externalizers, don't see that, just as they don't see the relationship between effort and achievement, but teachers must not let them get away with avoiding responsibility. We are pretty good at holding them responsible for lack of achievement, but not good at the other. How many student handbooks demand that students must take responsibility for their achievement and take pride in their effort and work? Few. Most let kids know about responsibility for their mistakes but pride in the school is encouraged. Think about that.
- As mentioned in the Profile section, discouraged learners learn best usually through practical applications. Therefore, unlike other learners (as discussed later) they need more variety of tempo, more planned activity in class, less sitting, more emphasis on applications and creative ownership. As learners, they are doers, not receivers. Get them engaged doing.
- Be an authoritative leader. Discouraged kids sometimes have been so neglected at home that they tend to see time as pretty much up to them to do what they want. They often behave not unlike very spoiled kids. In school, because of this, they usually receive only authoritarian dictates and expectations from adults; another form of avoiding them. The authoritative adult is one who has a clear sense of agenda, clearly knows the kid's strengths and weaknesses, as a professional knows what to prescribe, and does it. Flexibility comes in negotiating means, not ends. As an authoritative leader, the adult provides clear, realistic, attainable expectations, and offers adequate assistance in

meeting the expectations. It is the school's responsibility to meet the learning needs of the student; not the student's responsibility to meet the emotional needs of the adults. The authoritative leader is clear on that, and builds credibility with the student by meeting needs. It is the parent's responsibility to get the kid to school, the kid's responsibility to do the work assigned, the teacher's responsibility to make the work worth doing, and the principal's responsibility to make school worth attending. That seems simple enough.

- In class lessons emphasize real cause and effect relationships — nature, history, social interaction — since externalizers don't see it in their own life and behavior. Point it out deliberately and as often as it comes up. Then you can help a discouraged learner see the logic of it and the natural consequences of cause and effect in their behavior. When they insult a teacher, the teacher withdraws or hammers out. When they avoid, they don't get work done. When they linger in the halls, they are late to class. This seems so clear, but to them it is not. To them, the teacher hammers or withdraws because the teacher doesn't like them. They don't get the work done because it wasn't explained or someone stole their pee-chee. They are late either because it is physically impossible to make it on time or the teacher deliberately marked them absent. We are not talking of malicious excuses, we are talking of predictable behavior of an externalizer who does not see cause and effect relationships in their behavior.

- But be honest about luck. It is indeed lucky to be born wealthy and unlucky to be born in poverty. It is lucky to be born pretty, physically whole, mentally undamaged. The reality of many of a defeated learner's life is hard-working parents putting in great effort on marginal, at best, jobs, and getting nowhere economically. Effort in many homes does not lead to economic achievement. Kids see that, and classroom urgings to the contrary sound silly and unrealistic. Be alert and honest about this, but make it clear that in your classroom there will be a payoff for effort, and just the lucky kids will not be the only successful ones.

  You must promise and demonstrate this. These kids are tired of hearing "if you make an effort you will achieve." They don't believe it. They haven't experienced it, and too many adults in their life have written them off for not making enough effort. Of course many haven't, at least in school, but from their view of the world it does not pay off. Other kids receive the positive attention, make good grades, earn credits, and are glamorized at pep assemblies. So prove it in your class. Announce that you cannot speak for the teacher next door, nor can you promise anything with next year's teacher; however, you can guarantee that right here, now, in this class if effort is made, achievement will follow. It may be minimal achievement, but it is achievement.

To do this you must be extremely careful, again, to always put work in front of a student you know they have the skills to begin. If it is the other way, work is assigned that some kids do not even have the skills to begin, they quite rationally don't make an effort (What fool would? Not I.), and they are dismissed as lazy. It is cruel. Some spend an entire school year avoiding work, or sometimes attempting it and repeatedly failing, that the teacher knows they cannot even begin. Their last year's teacher did not adequately prepare them, or they missed too much school, or whatever reason. The fact often is, they don't have the skills from day one to do the work. It is very lucky to have an excellent third grade teacher and it is unlucky to have a poor one. It has nothing to do with effort.

But in your class, make it much to do with effort and not with luck.

- Raise their sense of self-reliance by doing anything reasonable and honest to emphasize internal responsibility and control. To review: emphasize skills that can be learned rather than "smarts," and insist on personal responsibility for successes. Talk about what effort made it happen, specifically, and insist on pride in that effort and the increasing level of skills that follow.
- Spend more time in class discussing concepts and less on memorization of facts. Get discouraged kids, along with others, explaining the concepts. These kids can think!
- Discouraged learners, who often can do things but not pass written tests on them, need to explain how they do something. Reward their practical and utilitarian strengths.

  For example:

  - When working in groups, let the discouraged learner, who learns best through physical involvement, be the one to develop and construct visual demonstrations.
  - Ask them to demonstrate to you or the class how someting works.
  - Have them explain to others the practical applications (vocational, in the home, in their lives) of what is going on. Help them discover this.
  - Ask them to tutor other students who also lack academic skills, but are even more behind.
  - Use them as tutors in the younger grades with discouraged kids.
  - Have them develop analogies to explain a concept or topic.
  - Have them invent simulations to explain concepts or to demonstrate how a math principle works.

- Encourage them to bring models or artifacts from home and neighborhood that demonstrate in their lives what is being taught in the classroom.
- Show that you value the process of trial and error. These kids are experimentors, so don't be judgmental about their errors. Get them to examine the strengths and flaws in the process of experimenting.
- Respect that they are "active" learners; let them move about the room. Don't worry, not all kids will want to do what.
- With drill and on worksheets, emphasize problem solving, applications and utility. Explain.
- Also with drill and worksheets, insert their names in the examples to catch their personal attention and help the work become more realistic.
- Do the above on exams.

- Be clear on means vs ends. Flexibility, divergency, and variety are essential with means. You can be firm on the end result you want. For example, they will have to learn to add, but they can approach addition in a variety of ways.
- Get homework started in class. Demonstrate, explain why and how, clarify the utility. Remember, home is the most unequal opportunity we have in education; get them started the way you want it to go, and pick it up early the next day so that you prove there was a reason for taking it home. If it **must** be taken home.
- Clarify for them why you ask them to do something — the purpose.
- Clarify for them how you want them to do something.
- Clarify for them the utility, the relevance, of what you want them to do.
- And be patient, wait for them. As learners who need to see the applications of what is being presented, they process information divergently. That takes time. Don't cut off their thinking process. If you do, they will give up, which is a rational reaction to being cut off.
- Do what you think must be done, you are the expert. However, alter contexts. If a kid says she or he hates math, tell them they are studying statistics and how statistics are used in everyday life.
- Finally, the adult must hold and communicate a powerful sense of purpose. The most important work in the world is being done here: learning how to be a participant in

one's culture. Behavior that distracts is unacceptable. We preach about "inappropriate" behavior in moralistic terms; we need to be more clear on what behavior is acceptable and helpful to learning, and what rules must be made to facilitate learning. Because we adults often are not clear on the purpose of school and reasons for rules and expectations, we often communicate to kids a very fuzzy sense of why things must be done. Why do we have school? To teach our young to be participants, and not simply spectators, of their culture. Even discouraged kids know when they are with an adult who has thought that through. Then when they ask, "Why do we have to do this?" they receive a rational answer. That shocks them, but they know they are in a serious, not frivolous, classroom.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS?

"So you know what to do when certain problems arise."
Elmer — student in a 5th grade "behavior" classroom

DIVERSITY IN LEARNING AND TEACHING

With all the excellent information on learning "styles," most of which would be far more helpful to teachers if not so cluttered and clinical, we can pin down four distinct, and measurable, modes of learning. We each tend to have a preference to learn either analytically, intuitively, practically, or experientially.

- The analytical learner prefers using linguistic skills, thinks logically and sequentially, is comfortable with order and precision, memorizes well, and sits patiently through workbook pages, textbook delivery, and lectures.
- The intuitive learner prefers thinking divergently and imaginatively, exploring many possible ways to explain a phenomenon, is attracted to ideas, and enjoys lectures and readings that invite conceptual thinking.
- The practical learner prefers "hands-on" applications, is extraordinarily uncomfortable with long-time sitting and listening, is comfortable with doing and with being physically active, and learns well when grasping how something works.

- The experiential learner prefers informality and sorting information out through personal experience, enjoys bringing the neighborhood or community objects and events into the classroom, is (like the intuitive learner) visually oriented, and is good at working with groups.
- The teacher who learns best analytically and probably teaches best that way will emphasize verbal and numerical skills, will concentrate on "right" answers, will be comfortable preparing students for standardized tests, will have a neat and organized room, will usually think neat and organized students are brighter and more serious than other students, and will be very impatient with active students who are either easily bored with routine or who think quickly beyond the facts and begin to conceptualize, fantasize or be eager to get on with applications.
- The teacher who learns best intuitively will emphasize ideas over facts, develop problem solving curriculum, explore different teaching strategies, stray from the lesson plan, value creative thinking in students, and, like the analytical teacher, reward (although with different nuances) intellectual probing by students. The intuitive teacher may tend to keep assignments too ambiguous, experiment sometimes for the sake of change rather than through an evaluation of what is working with these students, and perhaps will de-emphasize too strenuously the role of factual knowledge.
- The teacher who learns best practically will have many different activities going simultaneously, will use media well, is pragmatic and repeats what works, is more concerned with student involvement than with what is on the lesson plan, and is always on the go. The practical teacher often is highly involved with individualized learning and neglects the power of the group, allows thinking to get sidetracked by doing, gets too fragmented in the name of practicality, and neglects continuity and cohesiveness.
- The teacher who learns best experientially will have a classroom of kids who feel good about themselves and about being there. It is a classroom ripe with experience: theirs. This teacher is very flexible, good at building self-esteem and replaces workbooks, standardized tests, and formality with teacher and student developed materials based on relevant events in the students' world. The experiential teacher tends to de-emphasize factual knowledge, invites apparent chaos, and is so concerned with the daily process of group interaction that the "lesson" objectives sometimes are lost.
- In working over the past few years with classroom teachers who take a 100-question indicator I have developed on these four modes, teacher preference for learning is this:

Analytical:	28%
Intuitive:	28%
Practical:	17%
Experiential:	27%

- The hypothesis under which I offer this is that we tend to teach the way we learn under the mistaken assumption that our way is "human nature" and others also learn best that way. This is nonsense. However, we also tend to aim our teaching and delivery toward the analytical mode, for in that approach lies the traditional rewards: order, standardization, ease of measurement, simplicity, teacher evaluations.

- The message here is that since people learn differently, classrooms that do not take diversity into account are damaging many learners. It is patronizing and cruel to consider such learners "slow" and "difficult." School is a comforting place for analytical learners to be but not a comfortable place for practical learners.

  However, as you study the learning characteristics below, most discouraged and defeated learners come from the ranks of the practical learner. The serious question is: When did diversity give way to disruption/discouragement/defeat? In all probability, classrooms that were not geared to address the learning preferences of students whose mode was different than the mode in which most of the delivery took place taught young students to see themselves as "slow" and "dumb" so they came to behave that way. By middle school, they internalized that notion of themselves, and by high school most — unless blessed with magnificently brilliant teachers and parents with great tenacity — gave up on themselves as learners. Hence, the term "defeated learners."

  For some time I have asked teachers who attend my classes and workshops on discouraged learners to make lists of three different categories of students in their classes: Those who appear to learn the slowest; Those who achieve the least; Those with whom they have the most conflicts. Then the teachers identify these students under the four learning strengths discussed here. Of all the kids identified (remember the three categories) the results have been:

Analytical:	10%
Intuitive:	17%
Practical:	51%
Experiential:	22%

Most are startled! Over 50% of the kids who apparently learn best through practical applications, trial and error, experimentation, are identified as slow, achieve the least, and get involved in more conflicts with teachers.

These identifications are made by teachers, K-12, who take classes and workshops on improving their skills in working with discouraged learners. What must the figures be from adults who want to continue avoiding these kids?

- Teachers can, and must, expand their delivery and development of lessons and tests to reach out to all four modes. Below is a listing of characteristics by the four modes. Then follows a listing of strengths and cautions to teachers. By experimenting with different strategies and adopting from each category, teachers and other adults working with discouraged learners can expand their repertoire of delivery. It is not easy, especially if we have come through the years to see one way as "natural" and other ways as frivolous or only appropriate for kids who are "slow learners." But it can be done, and is by many teachers who are determined to expand their invitations to succeed. Discouraged and defeated learners must come to see that their way of learning and processing information about the world is just as "natural" as other ways, and they must come to feel good, rather than bad, about their particular way.

TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS	STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS
— Analytical —	
neatly organized room	thinks in detail, specifics
well-established routines	enjoys factual tests
careful planning	good linguistic memorizer
specific rules to be followed	enjoys reading in-depth
value students who are on time, organized, prepared	gets busy on worksheets
specific skills taught	appreciates lectures, skilled listeners
stress memory and comprehension	asks specific questions aimed at factual answers
impatient with active students	logical, inquiring
tests on skills, memory, "right" answers	good verbal skills, linguistic intelligence
	works well independently
	interrupts with: "Is this going to be on the test?"
— Intuitive —	
emphasizes ideas	imaginative, inventive
good mental organization	good problem solver
likes problem solving activities and projects	avoids memorizing linguistically
stresses many possible answers	enjoys lectures that require using imagination
values process of thinking more than product	enjoys tests that do the same
creative, imaginative, inventive	looks beyond given information for other implications and relationships
repeats things with different methods and strategies	can get lost in own thought, "daydreaming"
likes complexity, ambiguity	grasps whole
idealistic	flexible, adaptable
lectures and tests on issues, concepts, relationships	appreciates being stimulated
	hates being bored
	works well independently as well as in groups
	interrupts with: "What are the other ways of thinking about this?"

TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS	STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS
— Practical —	
seldom follows lesson plan	enjoys experiments
many activities going on	enjoys demonstrations followed by action
stresses action, involvement	intimidated by factual tests
unpredictable	lost in factual lectures
pragmatic, repeats what works	moves fast to get hands on something, to feel it, to experiment with it
moves fast, doesn't waste time	likes participation games
wants students to enjoy	gets angry if not busy doing
favors projects, games, demonstrations, simulations	impatient to get on with applications
works well with non-conforming kids	wants relevancy and utility
	often finds school threatening, confusing
	good at grasping how something works
	interrupts with: "How can I use this?"
— Experiential —	
makes things happen	sensitive to feelings
informal classroom	good worker in groups
involves students in rules, decisions	effective leader
flexible, willing to change to meet needs	goes beyond ordinary expectations of self-expression
stresses experience-based learning	visual learner
brings community into classroom	highly emotional, easily hurt, easily made joyful
creative	loves to talk about experiences
builds self-concepts	good at starting with known, moving to unknown
caring	gets into charts and graphs if visual is emphasized
enthusiastic	enjoys activities that stress human concerns
avoids workbooks and standardized tests	finds technology sometimes threatening
	interrupts with: "How do you feel about this?"

One view

Analytical and Experiential = CONVERGENT THINKERS
Intuitive and Practical = DIVERGENT THINKERS

Another view

Analytical and Intuitive = INTELLECTUAL
Experiential and Practical = ACTIVIST

Still another view

Analytical and Practical = APPLICATIONS
Intuitive and Experiential = IMPLICATIONS

STRENGTHS AND CAUTIONS OF DIFFERENT TEACHING MODES, TEMPO, RHYTHM:

ANALYTICAL TEACHING

Strengths:
learn facts
easily measured
accountable
clarity of direction
preparation for life roles
clear achievement
teacher in control

Cautions:
little involvement and ownership
memorization without application of facts
independent thinking de-emphasized
one-dimensional growth
facts change
narrow focus

INTUITIVE TEACHING

Strengths:
problem solving
open climate
emphasis on thinking
involvement, ownership
creativity, imagination
independence, self-reliance
interrelated concepts

Cautions:
lack specific focus
gloss over facts and retention
too broad
preparation for standardized tests missing
lack of apparent order
decision-making without adequate information

PRACTICAL TEACHING

Strengths:
self-paced
minimize competition
skills and applications
utilitarian
pragmatic
hands on
relevant

Cautions:
too narrow
group interaction missing
fragmented
applications replace thought
vocational emphasis can shape too much and limit growth
world changes fast

EXPERIENTIAL TEACHING

Strengths:
group cooperation and cohesiveness
involvement, ownership
flexibility
problem solving
non-threatening
start with known, familiar
discovery

Cautions:
chaos
overlook product
controversial
dependent kids get lost
confusing
lack of factual knowledge

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS?

"To save souls." *Colonial American Calvinists*

GOAL SETTING, ATTAINING, SCORING

The most powerful method of helping discouraged learners develop an internal sense of control and responsibility is through a carefully structured system of goal setting, attaining and scoring. It has proven successful in specific dropout prevention programs and also in regular classrooms when utilized on a smaller scale. The model explained here is the one where the goal process is central to dropout prevention. Suggestions are included for adaptations and modifications of the model. By no means are probable dropouts the only students who benefit from the goal setting strategy; however, they do remarkably benefit.

- Imperatives for goals:
  1. They must be short-term: set to be practical for over a specific period of time; monitored and measured frequently.
  2. They must be attainable. If any goal moves outside the control of the student, the impact will be to reinforce external control.
  3. They must be something the student actually wants to improve, negotiated with an adult but seldom set by the adult for the student.

4. They must offer some challenge so that pride in effort can be gained.
5. They must be specific and measured in quantity of achievement: for example, students can measure how many days in a particular week they did something, or how many assignments completed on time, rather than they did "well" or "outstanding."
6. Students must be able to see from the scoring, and experience in their daily living, progress made on the goals.
7. Progress must be displayed visually, on some kind of scorecard.

- If goal setting and scoring is a small fraction of class responsibility, it is advisable to set only goals that have a direct relationship to progress and development of internal responsibility in that particular class: getting there on time, doing assignments, volunteering answers in discussion, bringing paper and pencil, completing assigned reading. However, if the goal program is of utility to a variety of arenas in student lives, goals should incorporate school achievement, home responsibilities and behaviors, job, and — this is critical for discouraged learners — continuing to improve on something the student already does well. This last is, by far, the most difficult to get a truly discouraged or defeated young person to accept. Self-concepts are low.
- Goals should be set for a term of school or other specific period of time, and altered during that time only if it becomes too easily attained (and then it is better to alter the achievement expected rather than the goal) or if it becomes outside the student's control. For example, if the student has a goal to jog four times a week and then breaks a leg, it is vital to change the goal. It is critically important for an adult never to allow a student to set a goal outside his/her control. The fundamental objective is to build internal responsibility and develop pride in effort.

Goals can be scored weekly; Friday is prime time. It is advised to set goals in private conference with an adult, but scoring should be done publicly with the group of students sharing attainment achievements (or non-achievements) and specifics on what was done (or not done) to attain the goal. The adult should be constantly alert to point out what the student must accept as individual effort and responsibility.

Attainment of goals is logically tied in with earning credit or passing a class or unit. Make them an integral part of the class, and done by all students, not just the discouraged ones, unless you are in a counseling situation.

Sessions where scoring and discussing are the agenda will range from highly volatile to extraordinarily supportive and cohesive. Be prepared for adult fatigue. Should a student have a very private goal where public discussion would be frightening and/or embarrassing, score and discuss that particular goal in private conference. Make it clear to

students that, when possible, you will definitely check up on their attainment: attendance to another class, assignments for another class, chores at home. However, when it is impossible to monitor a goal, be accepting that it is better to error with too much trust than too little. Building trust is critical to working with discouraged learners, and adults have ample opportunities to call bluffs in other areas so that if a student knows they have conned you on a particular goal, they still receive an abundance of information that you are not an easy mark. But, make sure you do monitor every goal you can and let the student know why you are doing so: It is your responsibility.

At the conclusion of the term or unit, the student and adult total all the goals achieved for each scoring session, compute the percentage, and record it.

- This is how you score goals. Please see the "Goal Setting and Scoring Worksheet" on page 29:

1. Under "Goal," the student writes in the general goal: get to math on time; complete written assignments; take out the garbage at home; don't stomp out of the house after father yells; get myself up on time to get to school; stay straight during school time; exercise regularly; continue learning how to repair my motorcycle; etc. Let's work through one hypothetical goal: get myself up on time to get to school.
2. "Expected level of attainment" — If this is a very serious problem, perhaps four out of five days a week would be marked improvement for one month. It can be raised when four out of five become regular. Perhaps everyday, all five, is reasonable. Adult leadership is essential here to keep students from setting unrealistically high expectations that would contribute to further discouragement and defeat. If the student clearly wants the goal, it is unlikely they will set attainment expectations too low.
3. "Attained date" — The student simply enters the date of the scoring session if the goal was attained. Over a nine-week grading period, they could have eight or nine dates written in the box. If they did not attain the goal, they do the same in the lower box. It must be very clear: they either attained it or not. If the alarm did not go off, they did not attain the goal. If they had a hangover and rolled over to sleep it off, they did not attain it. If they don't have an alarm clock, either see that they get one or don't allow that goal. "Have my mother get me up" would be an inappropriate goal.
4. "Each Scoring Session" — This is done each scoring session. The date of the session and goals attained: maybe 3/5, or 2/3, or 4/4. Usually students will have at least five different goals; hence, the five columns. It works well for the students to take turns going around the room — or in groups of 8-10 — and discussing the attainment of each goal, one at a time. Allow them a few minutes at the start of the

scoring session to privately record attainment and fill in the boxes.

5. "End of Term" — At the conclusion of the term or specific time period, students now compute the total percentage for all scoring sessions. They now have evidence if they qualify for credit or not if that is part of your process and requirement.

Remember: the point of all this is to develop internal sense of control over conditions in life where that is possible, to accept personal responsibility for achievement, and to learn to take pride in effort.

- Some data from a high school dropout prevention program where this was utilized may be encouraging. Of the 67 kids in the program throughout the school year, 10 actually dropped out of school. All 67 were identified as "probable dropout." In the school year prior to entry into the program, the 67 earned an average of 2.23 credits. (Each class operating an entire school year was worth one credit. Students took five to six classes for the year.) After working in the program for a year, the same students earned an average of 3.93 credits; almost doubling their productivity. In the first semester of the second year, students earned at a rate of slightly over five credits. After the first grading period, the students achieved an average of 60% of their goals; 82% at the conclusion of the first school year. Goal setting and scoring was seen by the adults working in the program as **the** essential element for the success. Furthermore, in the first year of operation, only one student failed to qualify for credit.

- Many effective adaptations of this model have been made by elementary teachers, counselors, and secondary teachers who wanted to implement goal setting and scoring in a class but not on such a magnified scale. In these cases, goals have been established as an essential part of the class, but scoring has been, say, only every other Friday. And in these cases goals have been restricted to two or three for each student and only related to achievement in that particular class.

  Elementary teachers sometimes make them specific to a unit of study and change them with each unit rather than by grading periods.

  Counselors have implemented this model in their work with discouraged kids, still utilizing the scorecard and same criteria, but unreleated to credit.

- It is critically important to report to other adults (teachers, parents) that the youngster has a goal to improve behavior in the other adult's arena. They are often astonished, and their own behavior with the student improves dramatically when they learn that achievement in their class or performance in the home is actually desired by the student.

GOAL SETTING AND SCORING WORKSHEET

	GOAL	GOAL	GOAL	GOAL	GOAL
Expected level of attainment					
Attained date:					
Not-attained date:					

Each Scoring Session - Date:
Fraction attained:

End of Term - Percent attained:

NAME

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS?

"To develop competent, useful, belonging individuals." *Art Pearl*

WORKING WITH ABRASIVE KIDS AND BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

This section focuses on behavior that provokes difficulty between adult and student. Not all discouraged kids behave in these patterns. Not all discouraged kids present difficult behavior. But when they do, discouraged learners generally follow the "types" listed here:

TYPE	BEHAVIOR	POSSIBLE REASONS	HOW TO BUILD INTERNAL RESPONSIBILITY
BULLY	hostile, sarcastic, aggressive, threatening	Only way that has worked	Demonstrate this is no longer true
		Frustrated	Talk about sources, and other ways of dealing with frustation — we all get frustrated
		Low self-confidence	Point out how this contributes to others avoiding the "bully"
		Only role models available	You are now a different type model — make that clear
		Method of getting own way	Confront; it won't work with you
SILENT	passive, does not respond to suggestions	Wants to avoid	Make avoidance impossible; deliver a monologue (don't wait for silence to end) on your expectations
		Unclear and uncertain of expectations	Ask if they are unclear; clarify as often as necessary
		Fear of further failure	Slowly build trust that they won't fail with you if they make effort; don't be glib, however, this fear is very real
POUTER	takes everything personal, silent complainer, withdraws	A way to manipulate	Call them on it; confront
		Low in skills	Skills can be learned; time to get on with it and make effort
		Lacks confidence in own emotions	This is reasonable for children; discuss other, more effective methods such as talking openly about problem, and if emotions get carried away that is probably okay in the short run

TYPE	BEHAVIOR	POSSIBLE REASONS	HOW TO BUILD INTERNAL RESPONSIBILITY
CLINGING VINE	dependent, wants to be taken care of, helpless	A way to avoid responsibility	Call them on it; point out your pleasure in taking responsibility
		Authoritarian models in past	Be patient; you have to build trust that you are not authoritarian
		Fear of failure	Point out how this contributes to failure
		A way to manipulate	Confront: don't allow it
IT WON'T WORK	deflates optimism, negative, closed	Competitive	Don't compete; point out damage in this; carefully point out evidence that it might work, and gains to kid if it does
		Has been burned before by trying something new	Set up a no-loss situation; no fear; no penalty
		Low self-confidence; try to bring others down	Point out futility and harm in doing this; slowly work on building self-confidence through small achievements
CHIP ON SHOULDER	surly, quick temper, high emotional involvement	Low self-image	Point out items to be proud of in spite of poor behavior now; concentrate on present source of difficulty
		Easily threatened	Carefully point out that you are not threatening and never have been; no reason for chip
		A way to avoid	Call them on it; you can't be avoided

- Some general guidelines for all types:

1. Remember, these kids are discouraged and probably threatened by school, school work, you — if you keep that in mind, your positive intentions will be communicated even when you are irritated and frustrated.
2. Low self-esteem is almost uniform to all discouraged learners, and positive, effective behavior when they feel threatened or inadequate is nearly impossible. Initiative for moving toward better behavior is up to the adult.
3. Don't call names, like "lazy" or "difficult," but do specifically point out the behavior that is contributing to the difficulty. If they, in your judgment, are trying to manipulate or avoid, tell them and point out that the relationship with you does not need such behavior (they are not going to be put down, made to feel inadequate, or insulted). There are more productive ways to behave.
4. Let them know when their behavior makes you angry, and why.
5. Focus on behavior, not personality or "attitude."
6. They don't have to like you; they just have to make an effort, and learn.
7. You don't have to like them; you just have to help them.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS?

"It is better to have an education so you will know what to do when you need to figure out a problem." *Chris — an alternative high school student*

CONFLICT RESOLUTION WITH DISCOURAGED KIDS

In a situation of conflict between us and another individual, it can be generalized that most of us fit into one of three types: avoider, competitor, problem solver. The first two are negative; the last is mature and positive. With discouraged learners, adults must be the problem solver; the kids will likely be one of the other two.

- The avoider has highly fragile emotions in conflict, for conflict is very threatening. The avoider's objective in conflict is to get away from it, and self-esteem is low. Much bullying and authoritarian behavior (by adults) is a form of avoidance.
- The competitor has high emotional involvement in conflict and has a basic objective of winning rather than resolving. Self-esteem for the competitor, in spite of posturing and swaggering, is usually quite fragile — easily shattered.
- The problem solver tends to set aside potential emotional involvement, and pursues an objective of resolving the conflict to mutual satisfaction. Resolution, not victory, is

what counts, and resolution to satisfaction might take a very long time. The problem solver's self-esteem is high.

- On the assumption that the adult will be the problem solver in a conflict with a discouraged learner, the following guidelines are offered.

When in conflict with the avoider, you must:

1. Be very demanding that avoidance is impossible.
2. Painstakingly point out that resolution will be mutually satisfying.
3. Since they are not out for a victory, but just to get away, go as far as you can to assure you are also not out for a victory.
4. Check in with yourself, and make sure you are not out for a victory.
5. Continue to point out the specifics of the conflict that must be resolved, and do not allow side issues and behaviors to interfere.
6. When dealing with multiple issues with the avoider, avoid some that are not so important —be strategic in avoidance.
7. Be prepared for failure to get the conflict resolved. The avoider is the most difficult person for the problem solver to deal with, for avoidance is much easier to pull off.

When in conflict with the competitor, you must:

1. Never compete.
2. Continue to point out the goal you have of resolution and how that is to mutual advantage.
3. Keep in mind the probable low self-esteem of the competitor, and make certain that resolution does not appear to be a defeat.
4. Since your self-esteem is high, some verbal abuse from the competitor is relatively unimportant in view of the larger issue, the actual conflict. Would-be problem solvers often blow it by feeling insulted and changing the issue.
5. Allow the competitor some small victories. They can go to their peers talking about wins (real or imagined) if you get the conflict resolved. Their peers probably can sort out the compost from the reality if they are confident from their experience you are a problem solver and not a competitor.
6. Point out the lack of necessity for competition; you won't get into it.
7. Keep their fragile emotions in mind, and do nothing that hurts them.

8. Ask if the student wants a resolution, explain to them how to get it, and demonstrate.

9. Keep clear in your mind risks to the student for continuing the conflict, make sure you are not competitive about it, and clarify these risks for the student. Since you are in the conflict, another adult can maybe do this better.

- Try this Conflict Resolution Matrix. Think of a particular discouraged learner to fit each characteristic: avoider, competitor. You will probably not find a discouraged kid who is a problem solver. If you avoid, what is the probable outcome of the conflict with each kid? Or if you compete? Ideally, you are a problem solver. That's what adults must be.

	Avoider Adult	Competitor Adult	Problem Solver Adult
Avoider Student			
Competitor Student			
Problem Solver Student			

	Emotions	**Goals**	**Self-Esteem**
Avoider:	Fragile	Get Away	Low
Competitor:	High	Win Save Face	Fragile
Problem Solver:	Set Aside	Resolution Satisfaction	High

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS?

"To know about stuff." *Pat — a first grader*

FINAL GUIDELINES

1. Don't use a chainsaw to do the job intended for dental floss. Don't over-react to the discouraged learner. We, too often, focus on "appropriate" or "inappropriate" behavior in moralistic tones, not in a framework of learning. Building (or re-building) self-esteem, confidence, and internal responsibility is our primary objective; then skills; everything else, with discouraged learners at least, comes a distant third.

2. Use a chainsaw to do the job intended for a chainsaw. Be tough, determined, clear in your priorities, and keep in mind with everything you do that the most important work in the world is going on: learning; gaining self-reliance; participating in the culture.

3. Anything you do that contributes to an external sense of control will be harmful.

4. Everything you do that develops an internal sense of control will be helpful.

5. Discouraged and defeated learners are kids; they make a lot of mistakes. Helping them clean up after their mistakes is more important and productive than is punishment.

6. Don't patronize. Discouraged learners are not dumb, just unskilled and/or lacking in confidence. Give them real work and make sure that real achievement is possible.

7. Don't ever give them a task or an assignment they lack skills even to begin. Nobody is behind "grade level," they only are at certain skill and competency levels.

8. Don't believe them when they behave as though they are not interested in learning. They are. We all are. They use that as a smoke screen to avoid. Don't give up on them.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS?

"Well, to help you learn what you want to be when you are older."
Sam — a dropout returning for another try

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* A bit more on the goal setting, attaining, and scoring process

** More on the concept of building internal sense of control and responsibility

***Much more development of diversity in learning

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS?

To raise our young to be active participants, rather than passive spectators, in their culture.

Jerry Conrath works as an independent consultant to schools; conducts classes, seminars, and workshops for teachers; teaches college and university classes in both graduate education and undergraduate supervision and management; writes for education and management publications; and syndicates a monthly newspaper column on education and schooling. He works out of his home in Gig Harbor, Washington, and directs the annual conference, OUR OTHER YOUTH. He was a high school teacher and director for over twenty years, specializing in alternative education, dropout prevention, and school/curriculum organization.

FROM
OUR OTHER YOUTH

Jerry Conrath

- The life of at risk youth "imitates a series of dreary, unimaginative TV dramas interrupted only by silly commercials of items not good for them."
- "It is the parent's responsibility to get the kid to school, the kid's responsibility to do the work assigned, the teacher's responsibility to make the work worth doing, and the principal's responsibility to make school worth attending. That seems simple enough."
- "Learning defeat is not a terminal condition. It can be battled. In the primary grades it can be prevented. In the intermediate grades it can be cured. By middle school years it must be vigorously attacked and set back. When the youngster enters high school we must establish themes and rhythms of self-esteem and work from each as carefully and skillfully as a composer re-orchestrates a symphony."

OUR OTHER YOUTH explains reasons why so many of our young become discouraged about school and adopt defeated behaviors about their learning, and offers specific guidelines for adults who desire to make a difference and help solve our terrible dropout crisis.

OUR OTHER YOUTH is helpful to teachers, counselors, administrators, youth service workers, parents, and other adults who want to do more with at risk youth and discouraged or defeated learners.